S t u d i a P h i l o s o p h i c a
W r a t i s l a v i e n s i a
Supplementary Volume, English Edition 2012

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The Concept of the Good (*tagathon*) in Philosophy before Plato*

Abstract

The aim of the article is to outline an interpretation of the philosophical understanding of the concept of the good in pre-Platonic thought. The interpretation is based on those fragments only in which the concept actually appears. As a result of the adopted assumption, the ideas of the first philosophers, i.e. Thales, Anaximander and Anaximenes, were outside the scope of the investigation, as well as those of Xenophanes, Eleatics, Empedocles, Anaxagoras and Leucippus. In the case of the first philosophical systems of the pre-Platonic philosophy one notices a connection between the good and the One. It can also be found that understanding of the 'the Best' is depended on, and results from, 'the good'. This is true also in Heraclitus, though, at the same time, he introduces an significant reversal in this respect, for he abolishes the absolute difference between the good and evil, and turns it to a subjective relation. The good has no ontological basis in the Democritus' system as well, though the good's connection with truth, accessible for every human being, allows to interpret him as arguing for an objectivistic conception of the good. The objectivity of good has subsequently been denied by the Sophists.

The aim of this article is to reconstruct and introduce the concept of the Good as it appears in philosophies before Plato, on the basis of only those extracts where the analysed notion occurs. At the beginning, it seems important to mention that the concept cannot be reconstructed from the works of the first three "physicists", i.e., the philosophers of Miletus: Thales, Anaximander[1] and Anaximenes, either because they did not deal with the idea of Good at all, or because there is no information that makes the reconstruction possible. A similar situation occurs in the

* This paper is a slightly revised and extended version of a text published in the *Studia Philosophica Wratislaviensia*, I [1] (2006), pp. 87–99.

[1] According to W.C. Greene ('Fate, Good and Evil in Pre-Socratic Philosophy', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 47 (1936), p. 92) *to apeiron* is a good and he suggests that the cause of evil is the diversification, which appears in this principle. But it is rather that the good is the balance between opposites and evil comes out together with upsetting this balance.

case of Xenophanes,[2] the Eleatics, Empedocles,[3] Anaxagoras, Diogenes of Apollonia and Leucippus.[4] Probably, the problem of the Good had already appeared in so called rational pre-philosophical thinking, in eudaimonological, moral, as well as political contexts. In Homer's epics, a unique value system is founded on convictions about the superiority of people of good birth, whose task was basically to take part in war, where they could show their valour not only as physical strength (Ajax) but also wisdom (Nestor) and cunning (Odysseus).[5] Hesiod perceives reality from the point of view of a simple man-farmer, whose role is to work in the fields and be obedient to God's Law. Such conduct ensures affluence because the world is ruled by Justice (Dike) which rewards hard work, and punishes rejection of the divine law. Solon, in his poetic works, indicates the necessity of subordinating the value system to political activity. All human activity ought to be subordinated to the country's good which depends [entirely] on the citizens' respect for the law, and the law determines what is good and right. In their moralising, the thinkers ranked as the Seven Wise Men referred to the values connected with the country's good, living in accordance with religious law and moderation. The concept of a punishing Justice was also followed by the Orphics. The orphic idea had a much more advanced moral system, additionally encapsulated in a certain code of commandments. Killing, and eating meat were not allowed, whereas respect and love towards living creatures were required. The consequence of violating the rules is either eternal punishment and torture, or being sent to the circle of lives in order to become purified.[6]

1. Pythagoreans

Theorizing about Good began with the emergence of Pythagorean philosophy. The first Pythagorean establishment in the form of a school probably arose thanks to Pythagoras himself, after his appearance at Croton. There are three aspects of this first philosophy school that can be discussed.[7] First of all, it worked as a religious-cult association, which had its origins in Orphic religion. Secondly, it was a school with a political character, in other words, its aim was to educate

[2] According to Greene (*ibidem*, s. 95) the role of the good is played by the Xenophanes' god, and evil is among the phaenomena. But it seems that the good is the nature of the whole reality and it constitutes the essence of nature. Acceptance of the Greene's statement spells recognition that the good is the essence of evil.

[3] In the first book of his *Metaphysics* (985a) Aristotle interprets two active principles of Empedocles' philosophy in the axiological manner. Love is the cause of the good and Strife is the cause of evil; moreover, because the former is the cause of order (*taksis*) and the latter of disorder [*ataksia*]. Aristotle was probably followed by Plutarch, who interpreted Love as *agathourgos* (*De Iside et Osiride*, 370D = DK 31 B 18). But the four "roots" are simply joined by Love and divided by Strife. It seems quite difficult to interpret these operations in axiological terms.

[4] Such opinion was already present in antiquity. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1141b 3–6 (= DK 59 A 30); Plato, *Phaedo*, 97b–98b (= DK 59 A 47).

[5] For more detailed discussion of the values in the non philosophical Greek literature before Plato see f.i. J. Gajda, *Teorie wartości w filozofii przedplatońskiej* (Wrocław 1992), pp. 15–54.

[6] See A. Krokiewicz, *Studia orfickie* (Warszawa 1947), pp. 56–61.

[7] J. Gajda, *Pitagorejczycy* (Warszawa 1996), pp. 64–65.

future social leaders and it itself gained considerable political influence in Southern Italy, which possibly led to Italy's dissolution. Thirdly, it was a scientific research centre, where scientists [*mathēmatikoi*] dealt with mathematics as well as with the disciplines strictly associated therewith – astronomy and music. If we turn to a fragment from Aristotle's Metaphysics where the Stagirite presents the Pythagorean table of opposites, in the column that includes the positive things and values, there are also the following: what is limited [*peras*], odd [*peritton*], unity [*hen*], right [*deksion*], masculine [*arren*], quiescent [*eremoun*], straight [*euthu*], light [*phōs*], and square [*tetragōnon*]. There is also Good [*agathon*], whose opposite is Bad [*kakon*].[8] The mutual relation is also indicated by the Stagirite in his Nicomachean Ethics. He points out that for Pythagoreans Unity was one of the goods [*tōn agathōn*], and the Good itself they related to the limited [*peperasmenon*].[9] If one believes this form of Pythagorean philosophy, it ought to be accepted that the Good had for Pythagoreans the character of a principle [*archē*] and, as with other principles, it was located at "the beginning" of the system, so it would be that part of being thanks to which everything is; yet it itself is not with regard to nothing. Apart from what is good, Pythagoreans also spoke about what was most beautiful and best [*kalliston kai ariston*]. Yet, as opposed to the Good, they were not at the beginning but at the end, since they were regarded as a result and not as a reason and a principle.[10] This is why it can be admitted that the Good, as a principle, is the reason for what is best because what is best, depends on determining what is right or good, that is, what is best, is with regard to the Good, which becomes a measure for it.

2. Heraclitus of Ephesus

The philosopher from Ephesus also articulated a certain conception of Good. He says, for example, that "both good and bad are one" (DK 22 B 58: *kai agathon kai kakon hen estin*). It is probably one of the sentences in which the unity of the opposites is meant. We should remember that for the ancient "physicists" philosophy is also theology, and, thus, the philosophy of Heraclitus is a theology as well. For him, a god and a human being are opposites, because "for the gods all things are beautiful, good and just, and for men, some things are grasped as unjust, others as just" (DK 22 B 102: *tōi men theōi kala panta kai agatha kai dikaia, anthrōpoi de ha men adika hupeilēphasin ha de dikaia*).

The connection shared between fragments 58 and 102 allows us to say that good and evil are one and they become the good (the difference is wiped out in order to establish a positive axiological value), but this takes place only in the ab-

[8] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 986a 23–26. See W.K.C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, vol. I: *The earlier Presocratics* (Cambridge 1962), pp. 207, 245–246. According to C.J. de Vogel (*Pythagoras and Early Pythagoreanism. An Interpretation of Neglected Evidence on the Philosopher Pythagoras* (Assen 1966), pp. 192–202) this connection is amongst other links the Pythagorean tradition with Plato's philosophy.

[9] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1096b 5–6; 1106b 29–30; Archytas, fr. B 5 Timpanaro Cardini. See W.K.C. Guthrie, *A History...*, vol. I, pp. 245–246.

[10] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1072b 31–34. See W.K.C. Guthrie, *A History...*, vol. I, p. 251.

solute perspective of the god-*logos*. It seems that man can only realize this unity, because even a philosopher is left during his life to distinguish between good and evil. But this consciousness makes man good. For Heraclitus, there are few good people [*agathoi*], because only a few reach awareness of the nature of the whole reality. The ontological status of the Heraclitean principle [*archē*] need not to be explained, but it can be asked if the god-*logos* can be interpreted in the axiological way. Heraclitus does not explicitly connect the god with the axiological categories in any of his fragments, but it seems that there is some possibility of such an interpretation. It is well known that according to Heraclitus, introspection is the way of recognizing the essence of reality. In this process there is a discovery of rationality [*logos*] as the peculiar feature of man, which distinguishes him from the animals and decides about the identity of the human race.[11] In Greek philosophy we find the intellect strictly connected with the soul, which is not fully and absolutely cognizable. The soul, however, becomes apparent through the reason as some kind of necessity, which is not the same as indispensability. This necessity should be some kind of criterion used by people, but Heraclitus is aware that they make mostly no use of reason.[12] They are able to live, but their life has no value. The necessity is firstly discovered in the soul as the proper measure/proportion of the reason to emotions, and then between soul and body. Thus it is possible to notice necessity in the phenomenal reality in spite of the fact that it is ever changing. The "new man" (human being without the soul of the barbarian – DK 22 B 107) is now able to see the proper measure in the world recognized through the senses; one is able to see the *kosmos* ruled by the universal reason (*Logos*). The effect of the epistemological process of introspection is not only that the structure of the world is reflected in the subject [*cosmos – microcosmos*], but also that the latter is dependent on and subordinated to the former. The *Logos* and the measure are then the principal categories, by which the subject and the universe are connected, and it can be said that both have really the same or nearly the same meaning (they are certainly mutually determinative). Taken on the ontological level *Logos* as the measure organizes the cosmos as the proper structure; taken on the epistemological level *Logos* as the measure constitutes human cognitive activity as the subordinated to the rational, and on the moral level it becomes the criterion for moral action.[13] However, according to Heraclitus, every activity done at each level can be also described in moral terms. When something in the universe (e.g. the Sun – DK 22 B 94) oversteps the given measure, a state of cosmic injustice appears; it means disturbing the proper/good structure of the cosmos. Being in harmony with the measure can be treated then not only as a definition of what it is to be just, but also of what it is to be good. So, it seems possible that the source of measure (or measure itself), namely *Logos*, is the good. If we

[11] See DK 22 B 101; B 113; B 116.

[12] DK 22 B 1; B 2.

[13] It also concerns political activity. In the philosophy of Heraclitus, one can see a demand that every state should be governed only by those who know the essence of reality, act according to the rule regulating the correctness of the macro- and microcosmos and are able to translate this rule into the laws that regulate human behaviour.

assume that there is a plurality of values in the Heraclitean philosophy (wisdom, justice etc.), *Logos* would represent the highest Good.

3. Democritus of Abdera

The problem of the Good does not appear in the philosophy of Democritus in the ontological context. It can, however, be examined in connection with an atomistic ontology. Democritean principles (*atomoi*), as is well known, are characterized only by a few features (*indivisibility, shape, size, arrangement, position* – DK 67 A 6; A 14; DK 68 A 38) and none of them can be considered axiologically. This means that values belong generally to the ethical and eudaimonological sphere. In the case of Democritus, we are, then, dealing with goods [*tagatha*] and not the Good, although the philosopher also uses the singular term "good".

Democritus is considered to be an author of the first ethical system based on the deliberations of nature [*phusis*], and not on the religious assumptions.[14] His position in ethics can be described as objectivism and relativism. That means that there is no absolute value, because every value is relative to the atomic structure. But there are some values that are not relativized to the sensations or states of the individual person or the group. As he says: "For all men, the same is good and true; but the pleasant is different for different men".[15] How to interpret this enigmatic statement? One must find out what is true, and what is pleasant for Democritus. It seems that pleasure here cannot be interpreted as the criterion of good. So it has to be the brief and short-lived pleasure of the body, which is not something beneficial/good [*chrēston*].[16] There is, however, another kind of pleasure connected with the ideal state called *euthumia* or *euestō*.[17] This state comes to be through the moderation of enjoyment [*metriotēs terpsios*] and a harmony of life [*summetriē biou*].[18] Moderation and harmony have to occur on three different but connected levels. The first level concerns the soul itself, the second concerns

[14] W.K.C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, vol. II: *The Presocratic Tradition from Parmenides to Democritus* (Cambridge 1965), p. 489; G. Vlastos, 'Ethics and Physics in Democritus', *Philosophical Review*, 56 (1946), p. 62; D. Dembińska-Siury, *Demokrytejska nauka szczęśliwego życia*, [in:] J. Gajda, A. Orzechowski, D. Dembińska-Siury, *Prawda – Język – Szczęście. Studia z filozofii starożytnej* (Wrocław 1992), p. 113.

[15] DK 68 B 69: *anthrōpois pasi tōuton agathon kai alēthes: hēdu de allōi allo*. K. Freeman (*Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers* (Oxford 1948), p. 101) translates it: "For all men, good and true are the same; but pleasant differs for different men". This fragment is not contained among the fragments acknowledged as genuine by C.W.W. Taylor (*The Atomists. Leucippus and Democritus. Fragments*, (Toronto–Buffalo–London 1999)), but it occurs among the testimonia (*testi relativi alla dottrina*) in the newest collection by W. Leszl (139.4. *I primi atomisti. Raccolta dei testi che riguardano Leucippo e Democrito* (Firenze 2009)).

[16] DK 68 B 235 (= D 99 Taylor = 141.2 Leszl): "All who derive their pleasures from the stomach, overstepping due season in eating or drinking or sexual pleasure, have pleasures that are but brief and short-lived, (*that is*), only while they are eating and drinking, but pains that are many. For this desire is always present for the same things, and when people get what they desire, the pleasure passes quickly, and they have nothing good for themselves except a brief enjoyment..." (translated by K. Freeman).

[17] DK 68 B 4 (= D 26 Taylor = 132.1 Leszl).

[18] DK 68 B 191 (= D 55 Taylor = 137.1 Leszl). This state is described in the testimonia as *ataraksiē* (DK 68 A 167), *gelanōs* (DK 68 A 1).

its connection with the body, and the third concerns the relation with the external world. But every level concerns what is true – namely the atoms or the atomic structures, which should be arranged in a proper (moderate and harmonious) way. There should be no disproportion between these levels and they should create unity.[19] As Democritus says: "It is good, not to do no wrong, but not even to wish to".[20] The relations between human beings should be proper, that is to say, they should be subordinated to justice. But this subordination must be based on the proper internal state of the soul. There are two ways of becoming a good man. The first is to be good from nature, the second is to become so through education [*didachē*], by which human nature is improved and made anew.[21] The process of becoming good is anything but easy. A human being has to search what the goods are to attain them, and it comes to him or her with effort.[22] To search means here intellectual activity, to attain means practical action, and the goods can be both internal and so-called external values. According to Democritus external things can be goods, and if they are so, they should be priced and estimated properly after their achieving, because they are gifts of the gods.[23] Thus, the goodness of a good thing does not depend on limited temporal existence and limited knowledge of the individual or group, but it has its source in the eternal (but not timeless) and perfect being. This objective value cannot be changed, but it does not guarantee that all states of things in the world are good, because the subject-object relationship must still be taken into consideration. Even a good thing can be a cause of good or evil, if someone k n o w s or does not know how use it.[24] Once more, then, it turns out that proper/good/true structure of the soul, when it is devoted to intellectual activity, is sufficient to face adversities (evils) and perhaps even to fight against evil or at least defend against it.[25]

In this way, one can understand the statement about the identity of good and true, and its consequences. The proper/true state of the given structure is

[19] This unity is represented by the inseparable threesome: to think well [*to eu logidzesthai*] – to speak well [*to eu legein*] – to do well what one should [*to eu prattein ha dei*]; (DK 68 B 2 = 191.1 Leszl).

[20] DK 68 B 62 (= 160.1 Leszl); translated by C.C.W. Taylor (*The Atomists...*, p. 236). See also DK 68 B 68 (= 163.6 Leszl) and B 79 (167.5 Leszl).

[21] DK 68 B 242 (= 169.5 Leszl) and B 33 (= 171.1 Leszl).

[22] DK 68 B 108 (= 173.5 Leszl).

[23] DK 68 B 175 (= 148.1 Leszl).

[24] DK 68 B 173 (= 145.2 Leszl): "Evils accrue to people from good things, when one does not know how to direct the good things or posses them advantageously. So it is not right to judge such things as evils, but as goods; and being able to make use of good things is also a protection (*alkē*) against evils, if one so chooses" (translated by C.C.W. Taylor). The word "*alkē*" means not only "defence" ("protection"), but also "fight" ("battle"). The latter active meaning is not accepted in the translations, but it seems to be possible.

[25] DK 68 B 172 (= 145.1 Leszl): "Those same things from which we get good can also be for us a source of hurt. For instance, deep water is useful for many purposes, and yet again harmful; for there is danger of being drowned. A technique has therefore invented: instructions in swimming" (translated by K. Freeman). The idea of fighting against evil could be based on the interpretation of the fragment B 173 quoted in the preceding footnote.

always and for all people good. What is more, it is also pleasant or the supremely pleasurable state.[26]

4. The Sophists

The philosophical idea that refused to grant any ontological status to the good is taken up and developed in new directions by the sophists, who are regarded as representatives of the so-called "Greek" or "Athenian Enlightenment". The sophistic movement, as is well known, flourished in Greece during the fifth century BC. Being both a philosophical trend and a cultural phenomenon, this movement is probably one of the hardest to interpret. Similarly, as in the case of other presocratic philosophers, we have only fragments and other pieces of evidence to rely on, and many of them are preserved in the works of Plato, a violent opponent of the sophists.[27]

4a. Protagoras of Abdera.

Protagoras is considered to be the first of the sophists. He was an author of, among others, the following writings: *Peri theōn*, *Peri tēs en archēi katastaseōs* (the content is probably contained in the Plato's dialogue *Protagoras*) and *Alētheia ē kataballontes* (known from Plato's dialogue *Theaetetus*).[28] The surviving fragments of his works show that he was acquainted with Heraclitean and Eleatic philosophy, but there is no evidence that enables us to identify his teachers with certainty.

One of the most famous fragments to survive from Protagoras is the statement called the *homo-mensura doctrine*: "Of all things the measure is man, of things that are that they are, and of things that are not that they are not".[29] The term "good" does not appear explicitly in this statement, but its axiological interpretation was already suggested by one of the ancient philosophers. It seems advisable to examine the meaning of the object of the sentence, which is the Greek word *chrēma*. It does not mean "the thing itself", because Greeks described such a thing by the word *pragma*,[30] but "the thing in some relationship to man".[31] According to Aristotle, when the subject is interpreted as the individual with his or her beliefs [*dokein*], a consequence of this is twofold. Firstly, the existence of something

[26] D. Gibbon, 'Pleasure as the "Criterion" in Democritus', *Phronesis*, 5 (1960), pp. 75–77; G. Vlastos, 'Ethics and Physics and Democritus', *Philosophical Review*, 54 (1945), pp. 582–585.

[27] G.B. Kerferd, *The Sophistic Movement* (Cambridge 1981), pp. 1–4;. G. Reale, *Historia filozofii starożytnej*, t. I: *Od początków do Sokratesa*, transl. E.I. Zieliński (Lublin 1993), pp. 235–240; J. Gajda, *Sofiści* (Warszawa 1989), pp. 7–15.

[28] See Diogenes Laertius IX 50–56 (DK 80 A 1). There are also fragments two other speeches: *Epitaphios* and *Olimpikos logos*.

[29] DK 80 B 1; translated by R.K. Sprague (*The Older Sophists* (Columbia 1972)). The Protagorean thesis has caused much controversy among commentators. Many of the interpretations are presented in the paper: B. Huss, 'Der Homo-Mensura Satz des Protagoras. Ein Forschungsbericht', *Gymnasium*, 103 (1996), pp. 229–257.

[30] The word *pragma* is used by Sextus Empiricus (*Adv. math.* VII 60 = DK 80 B 1) in his paraphrase of Protagoras' words.

[31] The word *chrēma* is derived from the verb *chraomai*, which signifies, among others, "to be in want", "to have", "to use".

is identified with believing that something exists; secondly, the law of the excluded middle is violated. The latter is exemplified by evil and good.[32] It is clear, then, that Aristotle's testimony allows us to interpret the *chrēma* as something good.[33] In light of what has been said, it can be stated that for Protagoras everything is presented qualitatively, and the quality is always relative to the subject. What he means, however, is not that "the thing itself" does not exist; rather, he says that such a thing must be excluded from taking part in philosophical research, because there is no acceptable criterion for the existence of something. A good example is the following fragment from *On the gods*: "Concerning the gods I cannot know either that they exist or that they do not exist [...] for there is much to prevent one's knowing: the obscurity of the subject and the shortness of man's life".[34] Man cannot be in contact with the gods, they are not *ta chrēmata* for any human being. Similarly, the same is true about the nature of all things [*phusis tōn pantōn*] that was the centre of attention of the philosophers called *phusikoi*. This is why neither gods nor nature determine what is good, and the good and goods, then, are not something absolute and objective. Because of a lack of direct formulation of the theory of good in the extant fragments of Protagoras' writings, we will try to reconstruct it on basis of the section in Plato's dialogue *Protagoras*, which probably contains a summary of the treatise *On the Original State of Things*.[35]

According to Protagoras, human beings and animals were created by gods at the same time. To be able to save their lives Epimetheus has equipped all animals with the different skills and attributes (*inter alia*: speed, fur, fingernails), but humankind was left empty-handed. To help people Prometheus has given them some kind of wisdom [*sophia*], which was stolen from the gods. It has enabled man to develop speech and to discover how to obtain food and to find refuge from bad weather. The belief in God has come next. But human beings harmed one another and were killed by wild animals. The reason was that without the political skill [*technē politikē*] people were not be able to stop hurting each other and unite against the common enemy. To prevent mankind from becoming extinct Zeus has given via Hermes justice [*dikē*] and shame [*aidos*]. From this moment every man has them potentially to the same degree, and only their development enables people through the social contract to create civil communities. The evidence of the *Protagoras* strongly suggest that according Protagoras the good for human beings as individuals is strictly conditioned by the good of the society [*polis*] in which they live. Naturally, this good is not something abstract, but it is a reflection of the individuals' goods. In both cases, Protagoras identifies the good with happiness and it means that the good has ethical, eudaimonological and political dimensions.

In the light of this interpretation of the *homo mensura* statement the good is always related to the subject, and the treatise *Peri tēs en archēi katastaseōs* shows

[32] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1062b 12–24 (DK 80 A 19).

[33] It is difficult, however, to agree with Aristotle's view that the subject of *homo mensura* is the individual. According to Plato (*Theaetetus* 161c–162e) the subject can be a species, a group of people or the individual.

[34] DK 80 B 4, translated by R.K. Sprague.

[35] Plato, *Protagoras*, 320c 8–323a 4. On the reliability of the source see f.i. J. Gajda, *Sofiści*, p. 95.

that the subject can be both the individual human being and the group of people. But it also reveals that according to Protagoras there should be a strong connection between good and two interpretations of the subject which can be understood as some kind of asymmetric relation: *if something is good for the group, it is also good for the individual; if, however, something is good for the individual, it need not be good for the group.* The asymmetry is possible also on a higher level, but only as far as the opposition between public/political and private is concerned: *If something is good for the political group, it is also good for the private group; if, however, something is good for the private group, it need not be good for the political group.*

If this interpretation is correct, it affects another important rule of Protagorean teaching, expressed in the treatise *The art of debating*: "on every issue there are two arguments opposed to each other".[36] The rule can be understood now in a conditional and relative way. The two arguments are opposed and are equally strong in regard to their truth-value, only if the given issue is a political one; this means that a question X is disputed by two (or more) groups of citizens, whose only goal is to act in the interest of and on account of (the highest value) the good of the city-state. This kind of dispute can be only settled by reference to the power of rhetoric, and not to factual argumentation.

4b. Gorgias of Leontinoi

The philosopher was born in Leontinoi, the city-state in the south of Sicily, about 483 BC. Empedocles of Acragas and the Eleatic philosophers were said to be his teachers. His philosophical ideas are reconstructed on the basis of one short treatise (*Peri tou mē ontos ē peri phuseos*), two speeches (*Helenēs egkōmion*, *Palamedous apologia*) and other short fragments and testimonies contained in Plato's dialogue *Gorgias* among others. The two mentioned speeches are of special importance for the issue under consideration. *Encomium of Helen* is a typical example of a laudatory discourse, which was usually based on fictional material (the mythological stories were often the subjects of this kind of speech). From a rhetorical point of view, this kind of speech belongs to the epideictic genre (*epideiktikon genos*; *genus demonstrativum*), The genre provides patronage for laudatory discourse aimed at propagating the criteria of values, which were used in deliberative or forensic persuasion.[37] Such orations served often in the school of rhetoric to exercise rhetoric techniques (to apply the figures of thought and speech), because according to Roman literature theoretician Quintilianus "mind is thus employed about a multiplicity and variety of matters, while understanding is formed by the contemplation of good and evil".[38]

The aim of the speech is to defend Helen, who on the grounds of the Homeric epics could be accused of adultery and, consequently, of causing the Trojan war.

[36] DK 80 B 6a; translated by R.K. Sprague.

[37] M. Korolko, *Sztuka retoryki. Przewodnik encyklopedyczny* (Warszawa 1990), p. 48.

[38] Quintilianus, *Institutio oratoria*, II 4, 20: *Namque et ingenium exercetur multiplici variaque materia et animus contemplatione recti pravique formatur.* English translation: Quintilianus, *On the Teaching of Speaking and Writing. Translations from Books One, Two and Ten of* Institutio Oratoria, J.J. Murphy (ed.) (Carbondale 1987).

Gorgias tries to persuade the reader (or the listener) that there are only a few reasons for Helen's committing the "crime":

1. The Will of Fate [*tuchē*], decision of the gods and vote of Necessity [*anagkē*];
2. Reduced by force;
3. Seduced by words;
4. Possessed by love.[39]

The sophist proves that any of the reasons makes Helen not guilty of the charges. When explaining the fourth reason, Gorgias mentions the good. He says that the source of love is sight,[40] which produces desire first, and then love. Sight is used as a gateway, which is the door for the sensations to reach the soul. Some sensations can, for example, overcome human beings with terror, so they stop obeying the law which establishes what is good [*agathon*] and fine [*kalon*].[41] It is worth mentioning here briefly that a very close connection between the fine and the good [*kalokagathia*] prevails in Greek mentality and it can be implicitly found already in the poetic work of Pindar (VI/V century BC). According to this poet, the good and the fine/beauty, together with wisdom, wealth and youth, are components of the aristocratic virtue [*aretē*] highly regarded by Pindar. From the fragment of Gorgias' speech, it can be concluded that the conception of good that is presented here can be seen as a part of sophistic teaching characterized by the opposition between: "by law" [*thesei*] and "by nature" [*phusei*].[42] The good is not connected to the ontological level of principles, but to the subjective, often individual, conditions of our cognition. Men, their sensations and their mental and attitudinal presentations determine what is good, and because the sensations and their presentment are conditioned on the circumstances and they can change together with state of affairs, the judgement of what is good can be altered as well. And only written or unwritten acts of agreement [*nomoi*] between the individuals or groups of people can provide the values with a relative constancy.

The second speech, *The defence of Palamedes*, presents the methodical argumentation quoted by the mythological hero Palamedes against the charge of treason. The word "good" does not appear here, but there is talk of goods [*tagatha*] and good people. The goods are, generally speaking, the possible positive effects of human action.[43] They are something possessed by someone, and if someone is wise, and this means for the sophist that someone has to be sagacious, he or she would never prefer any evil to these goods.[44] To be wise does not signify to be perfect in every respect, because it happens even to the wise (i.e. good) man to make a mistake. Being aware of it, he or she should be marked by caution and

[39] DK 82 B 11; §31–33. The translation of the speech is taken from R.K. Sprague, *The Older Sophist*, pp. 50–54.

[40] There is the possibility of Empedocles' influence here.

[41] DK 82 B 11; §98–106. The example is war and the law establishes what is good and fine in the battle.

[42] G.B. Kerferd, *The Sophistic Movement*, pp. 111–130; J. Gajda, *Prawo natury i umowa społeczna w filozofii przedsokratejskiej* (Wrocław 1986), pp. 187–222.

[43] DK 82 B 11a , 105–110 and 172–183.

[44] *Ibidem*, 166–171.

respect for the truth. As well, one should protect one's own reputation, which is of even higher value than life.[45]

To analyze how Gorgias understands the good and goods it can be helpful also to consider the statements made by the sophists in Plato's dialogue, whose title is taken from the sophist's name. The enemies of the sophistic movement have accused the sophists of corrupting the minds and souls of Greeks (especially young men). According to them, the corruption was to consist in teaching that there is no absolute good or goods. It was based on this as well as on teaching rhetoric without suitable moral foundation, and giving people an instrument to argue and win regardless of truth and rightness. Thanks to rhetoric and eristic, it is possible *ton hēttō logon kreitō poiein*. But it is important to realize that this Greek expression can be understood in two ways:

1) To make the worse case a better one;

2) To make the weaker case a stronger one.

In Plato's dialogue[46], however, Gorgias denies that he teaches men how to make the worse case a better and he also stresses clearly and categorically that the rhetorician can indeed persuade anyone of everything, "but he should use rhetoric justly as well, as any competitive craft should be used. But I think that if someone acquires rhetorical craft and then does injustice with this power and craft, we should not detest his teacher and expel him from the city. For he transmitted his craft for a just man to use, but the pupil is using it the opposite way; and so it is just to detest, expel, and kill the one who used it wrongly, but not his teacher".[47]

So, we can say that Gorgias clearly distinguishes between good and evil, and the difference should be seen by anyone both on the individual (private) and the group (political) level. But in any case all values are determined and conditioned by the circumstances. This idea can be also found in the fragment of the *Funeral Oration* (*Epitaphios*), where in paying tribute to Athenians the sophist attributes them two seemingly contradictory traits: kindness and cruelty.[48] But how it is it possible to be kind and cruel at the same time? Gorgias says: Athenians are kind to the weak and cruel to their enemies. The citizens of Athens are able then to perceive some activities undertaken by the citizens of other cities and to interpret them as weakness or hostility. The former is good for Athens, because it does not threaten their hegemony, and it makes it possible to be kind to a weak city. The latter is something evil and therefore war should be declared on a hostile city-state and its citizens treated cruelly. The criterion of judgement is the subjective business of

[45] *Ibidem*, 218–233.

[46] It should be stressed that while Plato refuses to acknowledge the sophistic movement as a philosophy and generally estimates it negatively, the philosopher's attitude to individual sophists is nevertheless varied. In the light of the dialogues it is undeniable that he values and respects Protagoras and Gorgias, he makes good natured fun of Prodicus, but Hippias, Euthyphro or Dionisodorus come in for harsh criticism.

[47] Plato, *Gorgias*, 457b 4–c 3. I use the following English translation: Plato, *Gorgias*, T. Irwin (transl.) (Oxford 1979).

[48] DK 82 B 6.

the Athenians (to keep hegemony) and the assessment of the circumstances. But if the state of affairs is changed, this judgement can also be altered.

4c. Prodicus of Ceos

To reconstruct Prodicus' conception of the Good, we begin with the story of the choice of Heracles. It is probably a part of the lost writing entitled *Seasons* (*Horai*).[49] It has been preserved for us by Xenophon in his *Memorabilia*. Being at a crossroads as a young man, Heracles is ready to make a choice between two ways of life. Two women approach him. One of them has a splendid look and noble nature. Her body is graced by purity, her glance by modesty, and her whole figure by modesty and a white robe. The second is well fed, almost fat, and with exaggerated make-up. Her posture seems to be straighter than it is in nature, eyes wide open, and the gown so trimmed to stress a young look as much as possible.[50]

The latter's name is Vice [*kakia*] and she suggests that Heracles should choose the easy life full of bodily pleasures. The former woman – Virtue [*aretē*] – advises him to pick out of the ways of life the one burdened with efforts and deprived of pleasures in the beginning. This is probably because the human being has to be trained through work and effort to break free from the original state of wildness (dissoluteness, unbridledness) and to become a civilized human being. This kind of life is crowned with becoming a doer of good [*agathon ergatēs*], and Virtue itself becomes more excellent thanks to it. To attain it effort is necessary, because – as Virtue says – "of all things good and fair, the gods give nothing to man without toil and effort".[51] She argues also that there is no good in a life governed by Vice, and people, who are regarded as good disdain it as much as they respect Virtue. It seems this story shows that according to Prodicus the opposition between vice and virtue should be understood as the opposition of pleasure to hardship. It turns out, however, that to live according to virtue does not mean to live without pleasure at all, but simply with another kind of pleasure. The pleasure of vice is nothing more than pleasure of *pleoneksia*,[52] whereas virtue offers a pleasure of moderation, of reminiscences and of daily works among other things. The effort is something good, indeed, but only in the relative sense, because it is just the way,[53] which can lead someone to something much better – to happiness. The Virtue lists three components of the happy life: to be in the gods' good graces, to win friends' love, and to deserve the city's honour.[54] Virtue's whole speech shows

[49] The title was understood by Nestle ('Die Horen des Prodikos', *Hermes*, 71 (1936), p. 151) literally as the names of goddesses. Whereas Gomperz (*Sophistik und Rhetorik. Das Bildungsideal des EU LEGEIN in seinem Verhältnis zur Philosophie des V. Jahrhunderts* (Leipzig–Berlin 1912), p. 100) interprets this title metaphorically ("Jahreszeiten" or "Tageszeiten").

[50] DK 84 B 2 (Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, II 1, 22, 1–9).

[51] *Ibidem* (Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, II 1, 28, 1–2). I use the following translation: Xenophon, *Memorabilia. Oeconomicus. Symposium. Apology*, E.C. Marchant, O.J. Todd (transl.) (Cambridge–London 1923).

[52] More see H.-O. Weber, *Die Bedeutung und Bewertung der Pleonexie von Homer bis Isokrates* (Bonn 1967).

[53] The condition *sine qua non* seems to be in this case to bear and to overcome the efforts. The life of a man who did not make it, is described in DK 82 B 9 (Ps.-Plato, *Axiochos*, 366b–367c).

[54] DK 84 B 2 (Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, II 1, 33).

that according to Prodicus the good is located only in the sphere of *praksis*, but, what seems to be philosophically more important, there is no argument (besides the general sophistic attitude to reality perhaps) why good should be restricted to this sphere and why Heracles (man) should choose this way of life.

In this light, and considering the fact that work plays such important role in human life and this kind of human activity can produce financial benefits, we are justified in asking about their value. An answer to this question can be found in a Pseudo-Platonic dialog *Eryxias*, which is also known as *On wealth*. A statement attributed to Prodicus has it that the wealth is the good [*agathon*] for beautiful and good people [*kaloi kagathoi*], that is to say, for the people who know how to use it. And this means that the value of things [*pragmata*] depends on the value of the people who use them.[55] Consequently, wealth itself should be recognized as axiologically neutral and being of instrumental value for human being probably gains its value from the ends that it is used to achieve.

4d. Antiphon of Rhamnus.

Antiphon[56] is the representative of the so-called second generation of sophists and his works are preserved only in fragments. The conception of the good is a consequence of the opposition between the law of nature [*phusei*] and conventional law [*nomōi*]. Antiphon assumes that the present state of society – its political system, religion, legal, ethical and moral norms – is a result of a social contract [*nomos*]. According to him, the state is bad, because every act of agreement distorts nature. An example of the distortion of nature and the bad state is the division between free and slave, because it is true that all people are free from nature. This natural freedom means also equality between individuals.[57] Contrary to Protagoras, the natural state seems here to be something good and it does not demand to be developed by *paideia*.[58] For Antiphon describes the present state of society and assesses it negatively, his main demand is to act according to nature. Nature offers things which are helpful [*ophelein*], and human beings could suffer less than they really do and they could more pleasure than they have now.[59] Only nature can provide justice, because *nomoi* are ruled by the *ouden malon* principle, and even if some judge would pronounce the right sentence, it could be also a source of evil (hate for the judge for example).[60] Justice and the good life in society is possible only through concord [*homonoia*]. The fragments of the writing *On Concord* allow in

[55] DK 82 B 8 (Ps.-Plato, *Eryxias*, 397d–398c).

[56] On the so-called 'Antiphon question' see J. Gajda, *Sofiści*, pp. 157–158. The most recent collection of the fragments is: G.J. Pendrick, *Antiphon the Sophist. The Fragments* (Cambridge 2002).

[57] According to Antiphon the equality between men is assured by the same anatomical structure among other things. See DK 87 B 44B, II 27–32.

[58] It seems that the fragment B 60 can speak against this statement, but it can be argued that the fragment concerns only the physical education or, if we interpret it in the broader context, it concerns the *present* state of the human being, which should be educated by sophist to know that the natural state is good.

[59] DK 87 B 44, IV 19–22; V 19–21 (= F 44 Pendrick). The hedonistic aspect present in Antiphon's thought (probably exaggerated) can be also found in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* I 6, 10 (see DK 87 A 3 = T 1 Pendrick and his commentary p. 228).

[60] *Ibidem*, VI (= F. 44 Pendrick).

outline to point out some of the examples of this state. One of them is marriage, but only with an appropriate [*epitēdeia*] woman. The relationship is described as the friendship in which both individuals "think the same and breathe the same" [*isa phronountas isa pneontas*]. In this context, *homonoia* seems to mean a full unity in the mental and physical dimension, and as the result, there appears a state of pleasure [*hēdonē*].[61] Very important is the intellectual activity of human being – to think with fine sagacity [*to phronein kalōs*], because it serves to guarantee that human beings are able to participate and to save the goods [*agatha*] given to them by god.[62]

4E. *Dissoi logoi*

The short anonymous treatise called *Twofold Arguments* was probably written around 400 BC. in Doric dialect. Its content refers to the Protagorean work *Antilogiai*.[63] It is possible that the work is a summary of sophistic teaching made in a systematic way by one of the sophists' pupils. Analysis of the content shows that the author must have heard or read (?) teachings of Protagoras, Gorgias and Hippias. It is composed of nine chapters, but only five of them bear any titles:

1. *On good and bad* [*Peri agathō kai kakō*];
2. *On seemly and shameful* [*Peri kalou kai aischrou*];
3. *On just and unjust* [*Peri dikaiou kai adikou*];
4. *On truth and falsehood* [*Peri alatheias kai pseudeos*];
5. [no title] – it summarizes and complements the questions considered in the previous sections;
6. *On whether wisdom and moral excellence are teachable* [*Peri tas sophias kai tas aretas, ai didakton*];
7. [no title] – it is proved that government offices should not be filled by drawing lots;
8. [no title] –the sophistic skill is described along with its relation to values and how it works in the society;
9. [no title] – section devoted to the art of mnemonic.[64]

At the beginning of the first chapter, two ways of understanding the good and bad are presented. Both can be found in Greek thought:

1. the good is something other than the bad;
2. the good and bad are the same, because the same thing is good for some people and bad for some other or the same thing is good for man at one time and bad for the same man at other time.[65]

[61] DK 87 B 49 (= F 49 Pendrick). The relationship between more distant individuals is described by the verb *charidzomai*. See DK 87 B 54 (= F 54 Pendrick).

[62] *Ibidem*.

[63] T.M. Robinson, *Introduction*, [in:] T.M. Robinson, *Contrasting Arguments. An Edition of Dissoi Logoi* (New York 1979), pp. 34–77; *cf.* T.M. Conley, 'Dating the So-Called "Dissoi Logoi". A Cautionary Note', *Ancient Philosophy*, 5 (1985), pp. 59–65. The newest edition and translation: *Dissoi logoi. Zweierlei Ansichten. Text – Übersetzung – Kommentar*, A. Becker, P. Scholz (hrsg.) (Berlin 2004).

[64] J. Gajda, *Teorie wartości...*, pp. 144–149. Polish translation in: J. Gajda, *Sofiści*, pp. 297–309.

[65] *Dissoi Logoi*, 1-4 (DK 90 B 1). Robinson (*Contrasting Arguments*, p. 151) stresses rightly the ambiguity of the second thesis.

In a dialectical disquisition, the anonymous author of the treatise is firstly in favour of the second thesis and he or she argues for it using inductive reasoning and examples from the world we live in or from the history. Although the second thesis allows an extremely subjectivistic or individualistic relativization of good, the examples imply that a more measured position is taken, according to which a group of people determines what is good or bad. Then, the author starts to argue for the first thesis using indirect reasoning: *if the good and bad were the same, we would not know what is good and what is bad; we know what is good and what is bad, so the good and bad are not the same.* This general proof is also supported by a series of examples. The author is also a proponent of this thesis, but while he or she recognizes the difference between the good and the bad, he proves incapable of determining them (i.e., of answering the question what the good is [*ti esti to agathon*]).

Conclusions

The change in the conception of the Good before Plato presents itself in the following way: it seems that one can see a connection between the Good and the One and the dependence of the Best (*ariston*) on the Good in the first trends of Greek philosophy. The connection is still present in the philosophy of Heraclitus, but he has made a very important "revolution": he did away with the absolute difference between good and evil, and this diversification could be applied only to humans beings and their ways of knowing reality. But it is still an objective fact that people *distinguish* between good and evil and its importance for them. The philosopher can only be aware that the difference is not *absolutely* significant, and, what is more, it does not exist on the cosmic level, because the ontological entirety – *kosmos* – is simply good. Democritus has carried out another reduction. Everything that really exists is beyond the ethical order. It is, like in Heraclitus', a man's domain. The good is something objective, but not absolute, because it is connected with the truth, which is accessible to every human being. The reduction of the good to the purely subjectivistic area was made by the members of the so-called Sophistic Movement. Things for them are neutral, and the good appears as the effect of human activity. It is not, however, something objective, because it depends on the judgment of the individual person or a group of people.